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Life cycle

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Life cycle

After scare, Ambroses set for 1,000-mile ride to boost cancer awareness

Chuck and Kris Allen Ambrose will be riding their bikes together in the heat and humidity of July from their home in Misenheimer, N.C., to Boston, Mass., proving that they have come a long way since their first interaction as freshmen at Furman.

"I walked up to her during Orientation Week — we were on brother and sister halls — and tried to start a conversation. She looked right through me and wouldn't give me the time of day," says Chuck, with an expression that suggests he's still a little perplexed and hurt by the experience.

Four years later, Kris, a three-time New Hampshire State Amateur golf champion and four-year member of the Furman women's team, had a change of heart for Chuck, a three-time all-Southern Conference soccer player whom she often saw at meetings of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Eighteen months after they graduated from Furman in 1983, they got married — and have been a great team ever since.

In 1998 they moved to Misenheimer when Chuck, who is a former vice president of advancement at Carson-Newman College (and a past director of the Paladin Club), was named president of Pfeiffer University. Just a few years later, in June of 2001, they faced a frightening test when Kris, who had just turned 40, was diagnosed with breast cancer. With the support of Chuck and their two children, Charlie (now 10) and Kathryn (7), Kris took on the challenge with the same quiet determination that people who watched her play golf at Furman would remember.

"I would be lying if I said it wasn't a shock," says Kris. "But you can either sit and feel sorry for yourself or decide to take it on face to face."

With this kind of attitude, it should come as no surprise that Kris recovered fully from her illness, with the help of early detection and excellent comprehensive care at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center — where her anesthesiologist was an old friend from Furman, Tim Smith '85.

After surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, Kris worked hard to get back to full strength. When good friends introduced

them to mountain biking, she and Chuck caught the off-road bug.

Then, late last summer, while stuck in summer vacation traffic during the long car ride from North Carolina to Kris' New Hampshire hometown of Derry, Kris suggested to Chuck that they could make the trip faster on their bikes than in the car. Although made in jest, her remark quickly became the catalyst for an ambitious project.

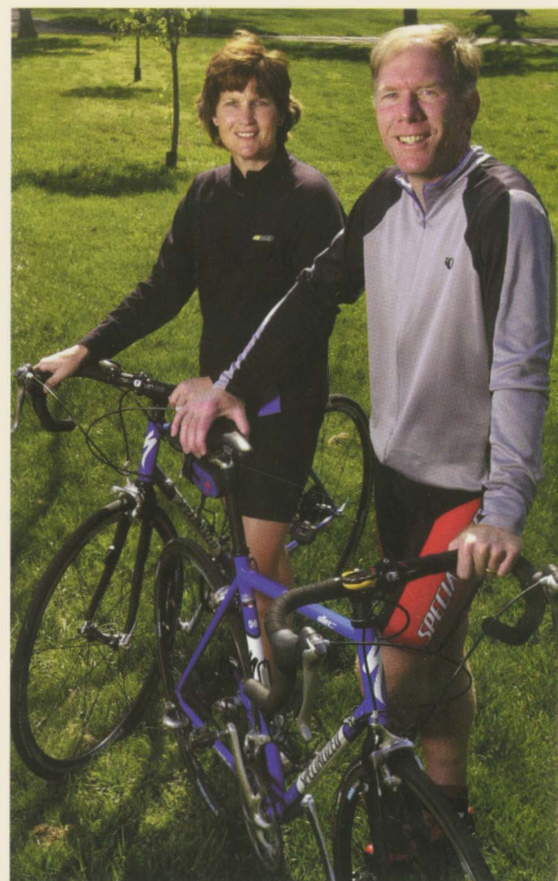
Soon the Ambroses were talking to their riding partners about how much fun it would be to bike from North Carolina to Boston for this summer's annual meeting of United Methodist college presidents. They envisioned an effort that would help others and also give something back to those who had helped them during Kris' battle with cancer.

Thus was the "Ride for the Ribbon" born, with a goal of raising more than \$100,000 toward cancer research and awareness. Joining the Ambroses will be David Joyce (a Pfeiffer grad and president of Union College), his wife, Lynne, and Jean Givin, a close family friend.

Some of the funds they raise will aid research at the Baptist Medical Center. The remainder will go to help college students whose lives have been affected by cancer. During the 1,000-mile ride, which will pass through Derry, they will hold fund-raising and cancer awareness events. Merrill Lynch has signed on as a corporate sponsor. (More information is available on-line at www.ridefortheribbon.com).

By the time they embark on their ambitious journey, Chuck will be nearing the end of his fifth year as president of Pfeiffer. During his presidency, several members of the campus community have been stricken with cancer, so the effort hits close to home on many levels.

"Pfeiffer, like Furman, is a special place because of people's commitment to one another," says Chuck. "I left Furman inspired to make a difference, having enjoyed an environment that emphasized the importance of a nurturing community and service to others. Kris and I have taken that gift with us throughout our lives, and we are



The Ambroses' 1,000-mile ride fits with Pfeiffer's emphasis on "servant leadership" this academic year.

fortunate to be a part of a university that embraces that same very special quality."

While he's always quick to give credit to others, Chuck has overseen a period of unprecedented growth and campus improvements at Pfeiffer at a time when many other small institutions are struggling to survive. By striving to be a "model church-related institution preparing servant leaders for lifelong learning," Pfeiffer has chosen Robert Frost's less traveled road — and it has made a real difference for the institution. (Interesting note: Frost lived and wrote in East Derry, N.H.)

The Ambroses' 1,000-mile ride has been driven by many but ridden by very few. Once again, they will be associated with the road less traveled. And they really hope it will make a difference.

Kris and Chuck Ambrose would love to hear from anyone who would like to help with or has ideas for the "Ride for the Ribbon." They can be contacted at (704) 463-1360 or by e-mail at cambrose@pfeiffer.edu.

— Matt Marvin

The author is director of institutional communications at Pfeiffer University.